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DISCUSSION

PHENOMENALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

TO prolong a discussion for the mere setting at rights of one's position were fatuous pains, but a better promise seems to warrant some comment upon the issues raised in the papers[1] of Dr. Montague and Professor Strong in partial bearing upon my own paper upon 'The Concept of Consciousness.' In that paper I aimed at presenting merely a point of view, not at all a metaphysical solution; but it is undoubted that in metaphysics points of view are at least implicit solutions, furnishing at least one's axioms; and, consequently, though the unattempted must remain unattempted, the burden of the issue is not to be evaded.

I

First of all, a matter of epithet. Dr. Montague designates my position 'naïve realism' and Professor Strong (not without reason) objects. As a matter of fact, I could scarcely choose the dubbing, least of all as connoting what Dr. Montague infers. Were 'naïve realism' merely a designation of sincere good faith and a somewhat expansible satisfaction in the reception of experience *en bloc,* I could not demur; but it seems to me that both this term and 'idealism' have become freighted with onerous epistemology; neither usefully names that non-partisan and catholic complacence in mere events which I conceive as the ideal ante-epistemology, and for the definition of which I was feeling in my previous paper.

Certainly it is with some astonishment that I find myself credited by Dr. Montague with a 'telepathic' theory of perception and by Professor Strong with belief in an 'extra-conscious world of *matter.*' So far from harboring either of these notions, or yet from entertaining the epistemological dilemmas which called them forth, I had not conceived myself to be in a position to define either one. My especial concern was, for the nonce, to escape epistemology and consider the possibility of an approach to metaphysic through compliance with the natural urgence of the phenomenal stream rather than by the bridging of what seems to me an artificially delved psychophysical gap. For the moment, I wished to disregard the problem of 'body and mind' in order to consider the more ancient and palpable problem of events in general. To indicate that the origin of interest is the *event*—the moment-to-moment happening which may or may not turn out to be a metaphysical somewhat—I chose the term 'phenomenalism' as conveniently evasive. From the point of view of an epistemologist, Professor Strong is quite right in terming this a 'lazy phenomenalism.' But surely there is another point of view, that of the ontologist; and it was ontological applications of epistemological interpretations (of consciousness) which I was criticizing, and an ontological predisposition which I was urging as metaphysically natural.

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[1] In Vol. I., Nos. 11, 19 and 20 of this JOURNAL.

I am far from considering this predisposition to be naïve if by 'naïve' is meant the attitude of the metaphysically unsophisticated. Naïveté, in the sense I urge, is rather a mental achievement, by no means of the easiest after generations of communal thinking and ideal construction. But the difficulty of the mental disrobement is no invalidation of the method, which, even in pursuance of the Cartesian attempt, imperfect as it was, has been richly rewarded.

II

Now, from the point of view assumed, the relation of consciousness to the nervous system is in kind not different fron any other relation of phenomena. Provisionally the brain belongs to the same category as the fixed stars, that is to say, the category of things having sensuous insistence, and, granted a hypothetical uniformity in experience, ontological determination of the stars is in some kind ontological determination of the brain; granted uniformity and consistency in nature, our problems must eventually solve themselves.

But uniformity really possesses no *a priori* necessity, and, in fact, in the world of seemings is squarely belied. The one thing we are surest of is our present comprehension of things hurrying to extinction. The isolative experience remains the common one, and consistency and continuity remain ideal. The aspect of unity in science is attained only by disregard of what fails to comport to the chosen gauge, resulting occasionally in most grotesque dissections, as, for example, when consciousness is made a sort of catch-all for unwieldy physical qualities, with the final absurdity that it has swallowed practically all that gives robustiousness to physical reality, while the uniform physical world that is left to us is a world of airy nothings.

Nevertheless, the instinct for uniformities, amounting as it does to a veritable passion of the intelligence, is not without meaning. Provided we always recognize that unities and identities are mental economies, methodological devices, and not *a priori* facts, we are warranted in our hypothesis. Uniformities are schemata rather than realities, and their value lies in the fact that they are keys to experience. Each science, with its selected uniformities, is a key to a particular field, and metaphysics, as usurping the most general field, is key to them all. Together they form a chart for the broad orientation of our way in life. But the chart is formed by a process of ideal selection, and the fact of selection of what is significant for us from what is not, or does not seem, significant, is no impeachment of the reality of the graceless residue.

With the others, the science of the human organism also is cartographic. Were every conscious event invulnerably paralleled by a brain event (as seems to me wholly credible), still the correlation of the two would not have been carried beyond the cartographer's standpoint. Concomitance is not identity, nor is an idea of a triumphant democracy a delirium of electrons. The office of language is to make distinctions, not to obliterate them. Indeed language, which I take to be nature's analysis of experience, reveals many disjunctions as gaping as that between mind and body.

By no means would I deny that there is uniquely a problem of knowledge. Only it is not primarily a problem of body and mind; that is a conceit which comes later, as a sort of third party's thought. At the start there is merely a heterogeneous experience, from the raw stuff of which there is slowly built up, by ideal or by instinctive selection, a structure which we call our system of knowledge. The problem which thence arises concerns the relation of the order of this construction to the historic order of nature. This problem pertains to a kind of natural logic, and is only to be solved, I imagine, by a sufficient account of the evolution of mind; and no one will be rash enough to say that the disentanglement of its historic from its schematic elements—'real' from 'ideal'—is like to prove an easy task.

III

But conceding, as I do, a unique problem of knowledge for which I am prepared to offer no solution, Professor Strong, who does offer a solution, may very properly require reason for hesitance in accepting it.

The reason he himself fairly shows in the second part of his discussion (No. 20 of this JOURNAL). The distinction there drawn between knowledge properly so-called and the immediacy of real qualities is one which I do not doubt. But, in deducing from this distinction that 'matter' (by which I presume to be meant reality not yet consciously related to the self) is sensation, it seems to me that he does not escape the epistemologist's bias. His conclusion only makes explicit what this bias necessitates—the establishment of an identity between psychical and physical, between mind and body, which language refuses to recognize. In ordinary speech the brain is not sensation, body is not mind, and ordinary speech represents at least intellectual expediency. Nor does a system which resolves to a mere assertion of the oneness of body and mind heal the gap which its terms presuppose.

For me the significance of the distinction which Professor Strong stresses lies elsewhere. Those real qualities which from our psychological point of view we call sensuous are the basis of what is truly naïve in experience, and presumably of what is properly the substance of the world. In human experience, with its intense specialization, they do not overtly display their ontological character; even in perception, as Professor Strong rightly says, they are mingled with palpable cognitive elements, and these give to our facts their ostensible natures. But it is easy to satisfy oneself of the insecurity of these natures. A fairly concentrated mental effort enables us to alter them at will, and in reviewing the mind's development one readily detects the progressive alteration of nature. Human experience as organized by human knowledge pursues idiosyncratic courses, and its so-called anchorage of fact is its most palpable and partial fiction.

Nevertheless, we are forced to judge and infer from the midst of this experience and on the basis of what it affords. Fortunately it does not leave us destitute. Knowledge—even in perception—is characteristically retrospective. That is to say, it recognizes an order of nature quite distinct from its own; its essence is the affirmation of a history which it schematizes, nor does it pretend to be true to this history except so far as is humanly expedient. The human bias is frankly avowed.

That we can wholly escape the disability which the form of knowledge entails is not to be thought, but certainly its own requirements of consistency and completeness impel us to affirm for those primary qualities which we guessingly recognize in perception other relations than their relations to our thought or feeling of them. The unitary consciousness that thinks and feels is a relatively late product of evolution and can not but concede a reality antedating itself. To reconstruct that reality into a world-order evolving in independence of our thought, is a proper problem of philosophy. In that reconstruction, body and mind would each find proper account, but it is hard to believe that they would be confounded with one another as *things,* after having been first so saliently distinguished by nature, or that they would be separated irrevocably as *qualities* when nature so emphatically unites them in a single experience. The 'psychophysical organism,' like other 'things,' is a highly specialized group of easily distinguishable attributes and functions, and it would seem to be metaphysically idle to hypothecate but one or two species of reality where nature has so plainly furnished a multitude.

IV

There is one other point to which I would briefly refer. In my previous paper I had endeavored to be explicit in challenging the notion of a brain-enveloped consciousness, and I can only understand Dr. Montague's curious misapprehension of my position, which leads him to credit me with a belief in tentacles of consciousness reaching from the brain to the fixed stars, on the supposition that he is unable to conceive non-spatial experiences, or even non-coordinated spatial experiences. As a matter of common conception, many of our ideas have nothing to do with space, while those that have are not always concerned with the same space. The space which we call real, as opposed to that which we denominate ideal, is quite plainly the outgrowth of processes of selection, and it is by no means evident that its reality is not to a large extent a fiat creation. In fine, even on the hypothesis of a noumenal space there is no insistent reason for locating consciousness within it, while from a Kantian point of view this would be patently absurd.

But Professor Strong has so admirably answered Dr. Montague's misapprehension (in No. 19, page 520) that I need not dwell upon it here. There is, however, one point in which both Dr. Montague and Professor Strong find an especial cogency—the matter of time, disparity between an event and its perception—and to this I would briefly revert.

The gist of the difficulty lies, I take it, in a failure to recognize the retrospective reference of perception. We recognize the object perceived as the cause of the perception of it, thus by the very nature of causality assigning it to the historical rather than to the cognitive order of events. This does not necessitate that the sensuous element in the perception—the flare of the dying star—itself become symbolical; as a matter of fact, this symbolizes nothing. But the perception, besides the sensation, includes that which makes it perception, and that in turn includes a direct sensible inference of the existence in time of the object perceived. The temporal lapse we recognize as temporal continuity, or, in other words, we perceive time.

If we ask what, in a metaphysical sense, is the cause of a perception, we must acknowledge that, very possibly, it may be different from what it is perceived to be; that is, our perceptual inferences are liable to error. But it is absurd to pretend that a cause is not actually perceived. When we analyze or when we experimentally enlarge the range of our perceptions, we may expand the cause beyond our original perception; we may add inference to inference, and include, for example, the body and its perceptive mechanism, or even inter-stellar happenings. In doing this, we interlard real qualities with ideal constructions, hereditary as well as individual, instinctive as well as rational, and, the chances are, eventually choose as the sole normal node of reference for reality its sensuous aspect, that is, its relation to perceptual consciousness.

But, even supposing the necessity of this choice, we may still urge that events are perceived as temporal in precisely the same sense in which they are perceived as spatial. I agree wholly with Professor Strong that the continuity of the world-order as a whole—whether temporal, spatial, or causal—is not directly conveyed in experience. But minor continuities are so conveyed, and our most ordinary life comports itself to the assurances which these continuities afford.

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REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

A System of Metaphysics. GEORGE STUART FULLERTON. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1904. Pp. x + 627.

'Back to Berkeley' is the suggestion which comes to the reader of Professor Fullerton's work from more than one aspect of the treatment. Indeed, the author himself often calls attention to the points of similarity between his doctrine and that of Berkeley. The theory of space, the relation between visual and tactual sensations, the almost complete ignoring of elements other than sensory, and lastly, a point which is decidedly in the author's favor, a lucid and trenchant style, all remind the reader of the brilliant writer of two centuries ago. In yet another respect the present treatise recalls Berkeley. Metaphysics for Professor Fullerton means almost precisely what it meant for Berkeley—chiefly a theory of knowledge, with some incidental treatment of the relation of mind to mind, and with a theistic outcome. Professor Fullerton has an extended discussion of the relation of mind and matter, but otherwise there is close agreement as to the scope and method. There is in Professor Fullerton's system little or no reference to conceptions of the universe, except under the categories of mechanism and teleology. There is no mention of the general conception of evolution. There is little or no effort to consider the nature of reality, except from the standpoint of the problem of knowledge. There is no effort to relate the moral or esthetic aspects of reality to its other aspects; so that if we were to take the title, 'A System of Metaphysics,' literally, it would leave out much which might reasonably be considered in a treatment of ultimate reality. Doubtless, however, an author has a right to write a book upon the sub-